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Editorial

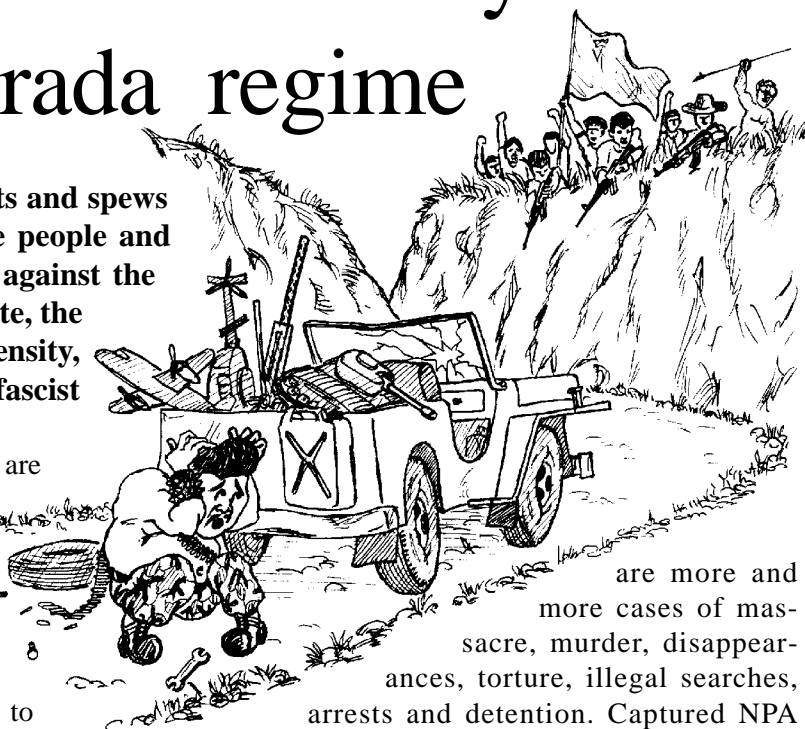
Intensified fascist attacks showcase the further decay of the US-Estrada regime

The US-Estrada regime spits bullets and spews poison in the hope of cowing the people and averting the growth of struggles against the fascist regime. As it grows more desperate, the US-Estrada regime raises the level of intensity, brutality and destruction wrought by its fascist attacks against the people.

Peaceful demonstrations and mass actions are now viciously assaulted as in the brutal attack on the anti-Estrada demonstration held in Quezon City in July and the all-out use of force to suppress the LRT workers' strike. Such viciousness is comparable, and in some cases exceeds, the Marcos dictatorship's all-out use of state power during martial law to suppress even the unarmed struggles of the people.

Estrada is further strengthening the machinery for military rule in the countryside. On August 1, he started augmenting by 30,000 men the 33,000-strong fascist CAGU to intensify further the fascist campaign of suppression and terror in the countryside. There is the distorted official belief that the revolutionary armed struggle can be defeated through absolute superiority in arms and by putting the population under military surveillance and control.

The fascist state's record of violating human rights and international rules of war are worsening. Large-scale military operations destroy the masses' crops, livelihood and property. There



are more and more cases of massacre, murder, disappearances, torture, illegal searches, arrests and detention. Captured NPA fighters are denied the status of prisoners of war and are deprived of their corresponding rights; usually denied treatment when wounded and systematically tortured before being executed.

A fascist campaign of disinformation accompanies intensified fascist violence. Led by the very chief and officials of the AFP and PNP, lies against the revolutionary movement are systematically woven and spread.

In a desperate attempt to besmirch the revolutionary movement, they employ the lowest

types of propaganda characterized by outright distortion of the truth. The AFP accused the NPA of violating international rules of war when it ambushed on June 27 an AFP “medical mission” in Jones, Isabela, which was, in fact, a brigade-sized operation to sow terror and destruction on the people opposed to the construction of a cement plant in their area. Also, in order to portray the NPA as having reneged on the agreement to release the two prisoners of war in Southern Tagalog, the AFP announced on July 22 a farcical suspension of offensive military operations.

The desperation of the US-Estrada regime grows ever deeper as the economic and political crisis worsens.

Contrary to Estrada’s boastful claim that the economy is on the rebound, the Philippines continues to suffer from a deep crisis brought about by the government’s unrestrained implementation of liberalization, privatization and deregulation. This results in the further ruination of the people’s livelihood and standards of living, especially workers and peasants who already suffer from the most wretched conditions.

Estrada and his economists brag about the \$16 billion reserves and the \$2.28 billion trade surplus. Bragging on the basis of such data is a desperate attempt to make it appear that the economy is sound because these very figures indicate not an economy on the rebound, but one that is slowing down on import-dependent production, and thus, is in the throes of a worsening crisis. In fact, in the first quarter of this year, listed investments fell by 90%, including a 70% drop in direct foreign investments.

The government cannot deny the worsening

unemployment. Despite manipulation, official statistics show a 54% increase in the number of unemployed from January to April.

The government wishes to carry out pump-priming programs including large infrastructure projects such as the construction of dams, ports, airports, bridges, roads and others. But the fall in local production, the all-out pouring of funds to advance the military campaign and strengthen the fascist machinery and the widespread embezzlement of public funds by bureaucrat capitalists have depleted the government’s resources. This year, the budget deficit is expected to reach P80 billion, more than the original target of P62.5 billion. In 2001, the budget deficit is expected to surpass the P82.5 billion target.

To finance its pump-priming projects, the government is set to borrow close to \$2 billion from foreign banks and institutions, primarily from the World Bank, the IMF and the ADB. To date, Philippine external debt has reached \$58 billion.

Thus, Estrada is going all-out in the implementation of the policy dictates of these imperialist banks. While other countries are slowing down on liberalization because of the crippling destruction it has caused their own economies, Estrada is going full-speed in auctioning off to foreigners the Philippines’ national patrimony. The retail trade, one of the last economic fields under exclusive Filipino control, has also been opened to foreigners.

Estrada gives foreign big capitalists complete liberty to plunder the country’s resources and earn superprofits even if it devastates the people. Despite widespread opposition, oil companies freely raise their prices (twice in July), spurring continued increases in the prices of commodities. This and the continued freezing of workers’ wages has led to the rapid decline of the toiling people’s living conditions.

The extent of the US-Estrada regime’s political isolation from the Filipino people is growing. The pro-imperialist and anti-people policies being carried out by Estrada further enflame widespread resistance among different sectors nationwide. There is a growing number of strikes and street demonstrations characterized by militancy, not only for the democratic interests of the oppressed sectors, but also against Estrada’s continued stay in power. The all-out anti-Moro war has not only isolated Estrada from the Moro people and leaders, but also from non-Moros who are angered by the devastation wrought by its fascist campaign.

The brazen granting of favors to Estrada’s rapacious

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cronies, including the Marcos family, Lucio Tan, Danding Cojuangco and Estrada's various wives and children, further deepen the factional conflicts among the ruling class. More and more are being disfranchised by such out-and-out cronyism, resulting in Estrada's further isolation even among the ranks of the reactionaries. Anti-Estrada factions continue forming organizations and gathering influence among big business and former government officials. Anti-Estrada groups are also being formed within the military. They take advantage of the low troop morale born out of the failure to crush the MILF and the continued strengthening of the revolutionary armed struggle; and the disgust among officials overstepped in promotions and appointments to desired positions because of Estrada's favoritism.

Estrada continues to enjoy US imperialism's principal support. This was underscored by the military and economic aid extended by Clinton to Estrada during the latter's US visit in July. Still, this does not mean that US imperialism does not extend any form of support to the anti-Estrada reactionaries. Just as in Marcos' case, the US is ready to drop Estrada once he is deemed detrimental to the stability of the ruling system.

The people's anti-Estrada unity should be further broadened. The struggles of workers, peasants and other oppressed sectors should be tirelessly advanced and linked to the struggle to oust the Estrada government. Along with this, we must take advantage of the widening rifts within the ruling class by openly and discreetly, directly and indirectly cooperating with anti-Estrada reactionaries and coordinating in activities against the ruling regime.

While fascist crimes become more brutal, the need to advance the revolutionary armed struggle becomes ever clearer and the situation becomes ever favorable for its intensification nationwide. The NPA should be strengthened for this purpose and for the all-round intensification of people's war nationwide.

The deployment of a large bulk of reactionary troops in Mindanao and other regions like Southern Tagalog must be taken advantage of by launching more tactical offensives against relatively small and isolated enemy units. We must also take advantage of the enemy's inability to absolutely concentrate its troops in all areas. Even in Mindanao or Southern Tagalog, there are always opportunities to intensify tactical offensives because the enemy is unable to concentrate its forces at all times in all areas.

While his government becomes more rotten, there is more solid basis for ousting Estrada from power. Everyday, the situation becomes ever favorable for advancing and strengthening the revolutionary movement. **AB**

Estrada's proposed "emergency powers"

Betraying the regime's worsening crisis of rule

Supposedly to hasten the rehabilitation of Mindanao, Estrada is asking the reactionary congress to grant him "emergency powers". Through these extra powers, Estrada wishes to prohibit strikes and favor capitalists with tax holidays and incentives in "economic zones"—some of the very policies behind the massive ruin of the country's economy. He aims to make Mindanao investor-friendly in order to attract foreign and local capitalists to exploit the island's rich resources.

Also among the extra powers desired by Estrada is a moratorium on the issuance by courts of temporary restraining orders against government projects that are under protest. Such a demand further exposes the regime's real intent—to eliminate any hindrance to its pro-imperialist and antipeople projects. It goes without saying that whoever opposes such projects will be more severely suppressed.

The implementation of the bogus Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program will also be suspended to finally cast off whatever remains of the reactionary government's pretensions to land reform.

According to the proposed Mindanao Rehabilitation and Development Act of 2000 (Senate Bill 2095), a Mindanao Coordinating Council will be convened to implement the ploy. It will be headed by Estrada, have the Congress and the judiciary as "observers", and include five representatives from the "private sector"—composed of none other than capitalists. Aside from the authority to draft such policies, the council can also enter into contracts for the

construction, repair, rehabilitation, improvement and maintenance of electrical power plants, roads and other infrastructure in Mindanao. As in other deals between the government and private contractors, the occurrence of large-scale graft and corruption are a foregone conclusion in this case.

Worse, a plan to put the entire country under these “emergency powers” instead of confining its scope to Mindanao is being proposed.

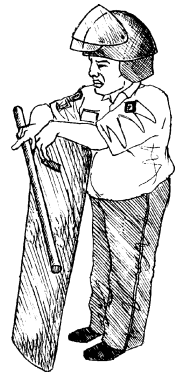
What Estrada really intends with his proposed extra powers can be deduced from the facts cited. He is seeking to tighten fascist rule and further open the country’s economy to plunder by imperialists and favored big capitalists, at the expense of the Filipino workers and people.

Estrada’s insistence on “emergency powers” betrays his desperation to save his regime from its grave crisis of rule. It is the motive behind the regime’s intensified attacks against the people. It also explains why Estrada is in such a hurry to open the national economy to the complete control of big capitalists.

The fascist and pro-imperialist “emergency powers” make the call for Estrada’s ouster all the more valid. This plot must be vehemently opposed. **AB**

Intensifying fascism in Metro Manila

To thwart the rapid advance and expansion of protests and struggles in Metro Manila, fascist suppression is being tightened in this bastion of reactionary power. The targets include not only the revolutionary movement and the legal democratic forces in the urban areas but also Estrada’s political rivals.



Because of the intensity of the regime’s crisis of rule, it now openly uses the instruments of terrorist rule to intimidate and suppress the people.

Enlarging and streamlining the fascist machinery. The National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) is the foremost machinery for fascist suppression in the region. Under it are five police district offices encompassing western, central, northern, southern and eastern Metro Manila.

The police machinery has been streamlined at every level, from municipalities and cities down to the barangays. The NCRPO maintains at least 172 detachments in 17 towns and cities in Metro Manila. In major intersections, it also maintains contingents of Special Weapons and Tactics Teams, mobile units and Marines in full battle gear and armed with M16s and other weapons.

Special police forces such as Gen. Panfilo Lacson’s Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force are also based in Metro Manila.

Using the antidrug, anticrime and anti-terrorism campaigns as a front, the masses in Metro Manila are being terrorized through the maintenance of police and military “high visibility” and the setting up of checkpoints in key public places such as big commercial centers and shopping malls and major intersections and thoroughfares.

Anti-communist propaganda campaign. The PNP actively leads campaigns to vilify the revolutionary movement, the Party and the NPA. A striking example is the intrigue that it was the NPA (aside from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front) that has been planting and setting off bombs in crowded places in Metro Manila.

Meanwhile, the masses are being terrorized about legal organizations and national-democratic forces in the region that are branded as communist. At the Pepsi plant, for instance, a series of anti-communist seminars have been held to split the masses as they advance their struggle. The genuine union is being accused of having connections with the Party.

Setting up an intelligence network. Frequently, members of mass organizations in factories, communities and schools who have been deceived by anti-communist propaganda are recruited to become part of the surveillance machinery against the revolutionary and democratic forces aside from the actual intelligence machinery of the PNP and AFP.

At the Food Terminal Inc. in Taguig, a series of courses on how to form reserve organizations of the AFP have been held since 1998. Part of the seminar involves training in intelligence work against the revolutionary movement.

At the Pamantasan ng Makati, the commandant of the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps. himself directly recruits informers from among the students. Those recruited are assigned to closely watch the programs and activities of

the student council, student leaders and suspected members of the underground movement.

Attacking and suppressing the legal democratic forces.

The US-Estrada regime confronts the struggles of the toiling masses and the rest of the people with an iron fist and intensifying open suppression. Outstanding indications are the violent dispersals of workers' strikes, demolitions of urban poor communities, dispersals of pickets, marches, rallies, demonstrations and other mass protest actions by the people as well as arrests, mauling and jailing of strikers, demonstrators, activists and movement organizers.

On July 24, up to 15,000 police forces were deployed to suppress and disperse mass actions against Estrada's State of the Nation Address. One-hundred nineteen were injured, 35 were arrested and one was missing in violent attacks by the police.

Up to 1,000 policemen were also deployed and ordered to attack the picket lines of striking workers of the Light Rail Transit in the last week of July.

Opportunist renegades connive with the regime in sabotaging the struggles of the working class. At Triumph International, union officials affiliated with Frank Pascual's Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya called on workers to end their strike and comply with the "return to work" order issued by the Department of Labor and Employment. One hundred and fifty policemen, goons, firemen and security guards attacked the picket lines four times as the workers and genuine union leaders stood their ground and defended it.

Dismantling suspected revolutionary bases. Communities and factories suspected of being mass bases of the

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revolutionary movement particularly feel the heat. Communities are demolished, strikes are busted and leaders are arrested to terrorize the masses and thwart the advance of the mass movement.

In urban poor communities around Victoria Homes in Muntinlupa, for instance, PNP forces along with National Bilibid Prison guards and inmates armed with mallets, crowbars and bulldozers tore down houses several times in April. After each demolition, the residents' belongings were ransacked. Similar incidents occurred in Pasig, Malabon, Caloocan and Makati.

In the face of such attacks and suppression, the people's resistance has intensified in urban poor communities, factories and schools. More and more are marching along the path of revolution. The US-Estrada regime's hold on power further weakens and the reactionary state trembles in its own bastion of power. **AB**

Fascism against the LRT workers

The picket line of striking Light Rail Transit (LRT) workers was violently dispersed on July 27 by the pro-capitalist, antiworker and antipeople US-Estrada regime.

On July 25, some 1,000 workers struck against the LRT, one of the principal public transport systems in Metro Manila. The workers struck after the three-month long collective bargaining agreement (CBA) negotiations between the Metro Inc. management and the Pinag-isang Lakas Manggagawa sa METRO-National Federation of Workers Unions-Kilusang Mayo Uno (PIGLAS-NFWU-KMU) ended in a deadlock.

The workers demanded a wage increase. They also denounced the imminent sale of the LRT to the Canadian SNS Lavalin International that will certainly result both in the mass layoff of workers and an arbitrary increase in the fare paid by about half a million people who ride the LRT daily. The strike gained widespread support and successfully paralyzed the LRT's operations.

Estrada immediately ordered the troops of the Western Police District and the Special Weapons and Tactics Team to attack the picket line and arrest the strikers. Criminal charges were also filed against them.

Unfazed by threats, the workers went on with the strike. In response, 1,000 police troops, LRT Authority guards and hired goons attacked the strikers and their supporters at the Bambang, Monumento and Baclaran stations. The fascists forcibly dispersed their ranks by mercilessly using water cannons against them and dragging them along the LRT tracks. One PIGLAS member was violently arrested by the Caloocan police.

Metro Inc. (the workers' direct employer and holder of a government contract to operate the LRT) closed down to kick out the workers from their jobs and bust their union. The government employed scabs to resume LRT operations on August 1 to once more rake in profits.

All this proves once again that the state-capitalist conspiracy will not think twice in using force to subdue the struggle of workers and bust their unions to protect their interests. **AB**

The July 22 SOMO is malicious

The suspension of offensive military operations (SOMO) ordered on July 22 by Southern Luzon Command chief Maj. Gen. Jose Lachica is not acceptable to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). In a statement by Comrade Luis Jalandoni on August 8, the NDFP Executive Committee member said that the SOMO was “made in bad faith, malicious and arrogant.”


The SOMO, purportedly effective from August 1-14 and extended until the end of the month, was supposedly meant to facilitate the release of Philippine Army Maj. Noel Buan and P/Chief Insp. Abelardo Martin.

But contrary to its supposed objective, Lachica arbitrarily and unilaterally set the time and place of the release. This is violative of the principle that the release should be the result of an agreement between the NDFP and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. This is a far cry from the SOMO that was declared when the NPA released Maj. Rene Francisco and Sgt. Francisco Melad in 1997 and Brig. Gen Victor Obillo and Capt. Eduardo Montealto in 1999.

This deceptive SOMO clearly endangers the safety of the Red army unit taking care of the prisoners and of the prisoners of war themselves. It does not have a single provision for the safety of those who will take part in the release process. According to the statement of AFP ranking officials themselves, they can still attack NPA units within areas covered by the SOMO if the latter engage in “terrorist activities”

The AFP persists in referring to the two officer-prisoners as hostages, contrary to the principle that the capture of AFP officials is a legitimate act of war.

In addition, the AFP continues to spread disinformation regarding the condition and health of the two prisoners, proving their desperation in the face of failed “rescue operations”. In fact, just as the NPA accorded fair treatment to its previous prisoners, Buan and Martin are being treated well in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and its protocols and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

Buan was arrested in Lucena, Quezon in July 7, 1999 by a unit of the NPA Melito Glor Command. Martin, on the other hand, was arrested by the NPA on November 3, 1999 when Red fighters raided the Dolores, Quezon police station. 



502nd Brigade

Scourge of Isabela

July 16 in Mapalad, San Agustin, Isabela. Philippine Army troops under the 502nd Brigade summarily executed Comrade Teresa Dayrit-Garcia, a cadre of the Benito Tesorio Front. Garcia, who was taken alive, suffered eight gunshot wounds, one in the back of the head. Captured with her was Sheryll Arcilla, 22. Although unarmed, the military alleged that Arcilla surrendered an M16. She is being illegally detained and accused of involvement in the ambush of Col. Josefino Manayao on June 27 at the boundary of Barangay Linomot and Sta. Isabel in Jones.

The 502nd Brigade is a scourge to the people of southeastern Isabela. Along with battalions currently and formerly under its command, such as the 77th IB, 21st IB, 45th IB and 54th IB, it has a long list of terroristic crimes.

Garcia is only the latest *hors de combat* who has been brutally killed by the 502nd Brigade. A few of its other striking violations of the rules of war are the

- murder of Comrade Cesario “Ka Deo” Piesa on January 30, 1998 at their camp in Barangay Sto. Domingo, Jones. Piesa was wounded and no longer able to fight;

- summary execution of Comrade Marcelo “Ka Mega” Astraquillo in August 1999 in Delfin Albano. Astraquillo had been captured and rendered incapable of fighting;

- murder of Comrade Lydia “Ka Ren” Sicat on September 7, 1999 in Barangay Dicamay Dos, Jones. Sicat, who was ill and bedridden, was shot in the head;

- summary execution of “Ka Makie” after he was captured in a firefight in Carmencita, Delfin Albano on May 25.

The ambush by an armed propaganda unit of the New People’s Army on a convoy of the 502nd Brigade that killed 16 soldiers (not 13 as was previously reported) including its brigade commander Colonel Manayao and 54th IB executive officer 2Lt. Wilfredo Estanislao, was just punishment for the butcher brigade of Isabela.

The 502nd Brigade also has a long record of terrorizing the masses, conducting illegal searches ►

Abduction and illegal detention of Nomer Kuan and Romeo Sanchez

One of the latest cases of the fascist state's widespread and relentless violations of human rights is the continued illegal detention of Nomer Kuan and Romeo Sanchez, both workers of La Union-based non-government organizations. They were brutally abducted by members of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) in Bilibiran, Binangonan, Rizal on May 8.

According to witnesses, soldiers led by Capt. Joey Panganiban and Sgt. Dagar Ayala posed as anti-drug enforcement operatives and boxed, kicked and dragged Kuan and Sanchez into a Tamaraw FX van that had no license plates.

For 10 days, the ISAFP concealed their whereabouts and deprived them of the right to see their lawyer, held them incommunicado and forbade them to communicate with each other. For two days, they were denied food and sleep while undergoing tactical interrogation and

were psychologically and sexually abused. They were blindfolded, mauled, strangled with aluminum wire and their legs were burned with lighted cigarettes. They were repeatedly forced to admit their alleged involvement in the death of Conrado Balweg who was punished by the New People's Army in 1999.

At first, despite the demands of relatives, friends and human rights advocates who sought them, the ISAFP and Abra police adamantly denied any knowledge of Kuan and Sanchez' abduction. But on May 19, AFP vice chief-of-staff for intelligence Lt. Gen. Jose Calimlim himself was compelled to surface them.

Calimlim lied when he claimed that Kuan and Sanchez were arrested only on May 18 and that they were "communist rebels" working for Lorna Rivera-Baba who, in March, had earlier been implicated by the regime in Balweg's death. **AB**

◀ of homes, illegal arrests and detention, arson and threats of arson against houses and barns, forcing civilians to act as guides in operations, beatings, rape and other abuses against women, training guns at civilians and discharging firearms in their presence.

They are also notorious protectors of logging companies and other comprador businesses in the province such as the environmentally destructive Royal Cement Corp. to be set up in Dicamay Uno and Dos in Jones despite fierce opposition from the people.

The 502nd Brigade once more bared its rabidly fascist character when it unleashed its terror anew in Jones and nearby towns after the ambush on Colonel Manayao.

On July 14 and 15, forces of the 5th Recon Coy under the 5th ID and 502nd Brigade led by Lieutenant Alburo and Captain Derla attacked various sitios in Barangay Villa Bello in Jones.

At the barangay center, they illegally ransacked the houses of Marcelo Arriola and Amajun Adsuaara and tore down the wall of a civilian's hut allegedly to prevent NPA fighters from hiding in it. Not satisfied, the troops fired shots after supposedly being irritated by the noise made by merrymaking teenagers. They repeated the latter and perpetrated other terroristic acts against the masses in nearby sitios.

In a related incident, 502nd Brigade troops burned down the house of Virgilio Bayot, a poor peasant from Linomot, Jones on July 13.

Prior to this, the military had also ransacked and ille-

gally searched houses in Villa Bello, Dicamay and nearby barrios of Jones on June 28 and 29.

In another grim violation of the people's rights, the 502nd Brigade murdered two civilians suspected of supporting the people's army and burned down a number of houses after an NPA unit was encircled recently in Dapis, Napaliong, Jones.

But since the troops of the 502nd Brigade feel the people's intense loathing, there is widespread demoralization among their ranks. This was marked by two platoons' refusal to provide support when the convoy of their own commanding officer, Colonel Manayao was ambushed, despite the fact that one platoon was only less than three kilometers away and the other could have reached the ambush site after a two-hour hike.

Two platoons of the butcher brigade were unable to move, fearful of the people's wrath. **AB**

THE AMBUSH BY AN ARMED PROPAGANDA UNIT OF THE NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY ON A CONVOY OF THE 502ND BRIGADE THAT KILLED 16 SOLDIERS (NOT 13 AS WAS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED) INCLUDING ITS BRIGADE COMMANDER COLONEL MANAYAO AND 54TH IB EXECUTIVE OFFICER 2LT. WILFREDO ESTANISLAO, WAS JUST PUNISHMENT FOR THE BUTCHER BRIGADE OF ISABELA.

Deception and violence against Metro Manila's poor

Invoking “development”, the reactionary regime is relentlessly destroying poor communities in Metro Manila to benefit conspiring bureaucrats and foreign monopoly capitalists and local big businesses in real estate, construction, basic services and utilities.

In the process, the reactionary government profits from the poor through its deceptive housing, land distribution and relocation programs in connivance with petty bourgeois racketeering groups. It aims to destroy not only the homes and livelihood of the poor in the interest of big businesses and bureaucrats, but also actual and potential mass bases of the revolutionary movement.

The reactionary government conspires with the World Bank and private developers affiliated with the Chamber of Real Estate and Builder's Association (CREBA) in this scheme. According to the World Bank's bankrupt concept, the widespread homelessness of workers and semi-workers is simply the result of lack of funding; and that projects geared towards solving this should be based on the market (meaning, on the availability of buyers) and not on the people's right to, and need for, decent housing.

The World Bank is set to grant the government a \$120 million (P4.8 billion)-loan while the Estrada regime prepares a counterpart sum from public funds earmarked for the pension of government employees. As proof of the insidiousness of such programs, “beneficiaries” are to pay by installment. In the past, home mortgage interest rates were at 9% per annum. They are set to reach up to 15% under the current program.

In such a setup, favored CREBA developers are able to exploit government credit while making sure that they rake in millions in profits from the poor tenants living in rows of cramped and substandard housing units built on unsafe sites. The lowest monthly installment rate is P500 for a unit no bigger than 18 square meters; while a slightly larger unit costs P5,000 monthly.

The largest developers like the Ayala and Aboitiz families are at the forefront of CREBA. Meanwhile, officials of the reactionary government are scrambling to grab a big chunk of the P200 billion-fund allocated to low-cost housing. Speaker Manuel Villar owns (through dummies) C&P Homes, the largest real estate company dealing in low- and medium-cost housing.

Real estate businesses of Estrada's wives, children and relatives emerged as he began his term as president. Among them, Guia Gomez and Jose Victor “JV” Ejercito, Estrada's favorite wife and son, have set up the most number of real estate companies in 1998 and 1999. Capitalization of their companies grew at a scandalous rate. An example is JV Ejercito's construction company Buildworth. Valued at P14 million in 1997, it was worth P83.3 million by 1998.

Reactionary officials are also scurrying for positions that would enable them to control such funds. The Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council tasked to manage all housing projects became the center of an intense power struggle within Estrada's cabinet in late 1999. Lenny de Jesus, a Danding Cojuangco minion, won control over it.

Demolishing poor communities is part of the Estrada regime's housing program. Since the beginning of Estrada's term, over 50,000 poor families have already been violently evicted from their homes in Metro Manila. An estimated 500,000 families more will be forced out of their homes in the coming years.

To thwart resistance from residents and freely carry out demolitions, the reactionary government concocts various schemes to split the ranks of the urban poor and further trample upon their rights. Among these schemes are the criminalization

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of the urban poor as “professional squatters”, the seizure of previously distributed land and now, the proposed moratorium on the issuance by courts of temporary restraining orders against any government “development” project.

In communities where the urban poor have attained a certain level of self-organization, reactionaries dish out offers of low-cost housing, relocation to adjacent provinces and

money to bribe a few and split the ranks of the poor. The tiny grouplets of revisionist renegades, as well as the anti-communist social democrats serve as partners of the reaction- ►

Justice for the victims of Payatas!

The Party and all revolutionary forces join the demand for justice of the residents of Payatas, Quezon City. Officials of the reactionary government should be made liable for the deaths of more than 300 urban poor residents by an avalanche of mud and garbage on July 10.

These officials have committed a major crime for allowing the dumping of garbage in the Payatas Dumpsite without considering the danger posed on the residents' houses. Desperate to escape responsibility, they stopped the operations of the dumpsite, cutting off the Payatas residents from their source of livelihood.

The problem of decent housing and unemployment of the urban poor residents of Payatas are born out of the reactionary government's economic policies in general, and its policy on housing in particular, both of which principally serve the interests of foreign and local big capitalists, including housing and real estate developers.

Thus, the Payatas victims can achieve genuine justice only by overthrowing the present ruling system through revolutionary struggle and building a new democratic government that shall genuinely uphold the interests of the oppressed. **AB**

San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project: Gigantic burden to the people

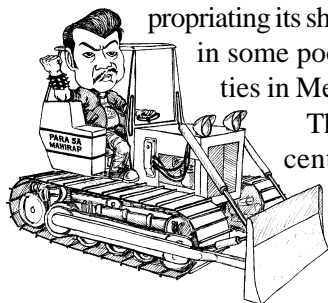
Millions of people will be endangered by the construction of the San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project (SRMDP). More than 2,300 families, mostly hailing from the Ibaloi minority, will immediately be evicted and lose their livelihood and homes because of the project. The government forcibly reduced about 18% of these families to the status of paupers last year. The project will destroy 39,504 hectares of watershed areas from which 150,000 people from San Nicolas and San Manuel, Pangasinan and Tuba and Itogon, Benguet, make a living. This project mires the Philippines deeper in debt.

These are only some of the effects of the SRMDP, which the Estrada regime regards as the country's monument of the new millennium.

The SRMDP

There are 718 dams awaiting construction in the Philippines. Ten of these are in the Cordillera, including the SRMDP, which is currently the largest infrastructure project in the Philippines. It is being built along the Pangasinan-Benguet border and is the third dam on the Agno River after the Ambuklao (1956) and Binga (1960) dams. The dam stands around 200 meters (the highest in Asia) high, stretches more than a kilometer long and is around 13 sq. kilometers in width. It is the 11th largest in

any government in sowing discord, splitting and breaking their struggle. In the past years, the now fragmented and moribund group of Popoy Lagman led the rest in making money out of the struggles of the urban poor. Frank Pascual's KPD has also been doing some scene-stealing and is appropriating its share of the loot in some poor communities in Metro Manila.



The lack of decent housing in urban centers is one of the most

severe problems facing workers and semi-workers. It arises, on one hand, from very low wages, the mass dismissal of workers and the displacement of peasants in the countryside even as there are no jobs in the cities to absorb them. On the other hand, it is also due to the all-out destruction of working class communities to give way to large enterprises and government infrastructure. Not a few are being driven to the streets, pushed to the cities' peripheries and owing to the high cost of decent housing, are forced to rent houses that look like pigpens.

As it was under previous regimes,

nothing can be expected from the Estrada government's grand housing showcase so long as the exploitation and oppression of the working class remains and worsens. Only the reactionary classes stand to benefit from this program. Low rentals or even free housing will not completely solve the housing problem as long as the social system that created it exists. Only through the struggle of workers and semi-workers, in solidarity with the peasant masses and within the framework of the national democratic revolution, can the real solution to the housing problem be achieved. **AB**

the world and the third largest in Asia. It is presently the largest private hydroelectric power project in the world.

The project was formally started in December 1997 when an agreement was signed by the National Power Corporation (Napocor) and the San Roque Power Corporation (SRPC), that administers the construction and operation of the dam.

The SRPC is a giant consortium involving the Marubeni Corporation of Japan, Sithe Philippines Holdings (a division of Sithe Energies of the US, where 29% of stocks are also owned by Marubeni Corp.) and the Kansai Electric Power Company also of Japan.

The US Raytheon Engineers and Contractors bagged the \$700 million contract for the construction of the \$1.9 billion project. Consistent with the reactionary government's pernicious habit, funding for this project was raised through foreign borrowings. The government has already been able to borrow \$1.5 billion from various monopoly banks and has also entered into negotiations to raise the balance.

Forty percent (40%) of the project had already been finished as of May. It is targeted for completion by 2004, Estrada's last year in office.

The government entered into an onerous contract with the SRPC. The SRPC may abandon the project any time it feels that it will not be raking in massive profits from the contract. Whether electricity is generated

or not, the government is obliged to pay \$10 million every month.

Pangasinan will also suffer environmental damage because quarries will be set up in the province for

the gravel and sand needed for the dam's construction.

It is not even necessary to construct the dam to provide electricity. According to the NAPOCOR Employees & Workers Union in Northern Luzon, the NAPOCOR has a reserve capacity of 2,000 megawatts (or almost a third of the country's electricity requirement) for the Luzon grid. Besides, even if the dam does generate electricity, its cost will be too high compared to the amount NAPOCOR currently pays to independent power producers.

For whom?

In February 1998, the eviction of people began in the construction area. Once more, the Ibaloi minority in Benguet were harassed and deceived in order to eject them from the land they have long been tilling. Before the project is finished, some 61,700 people will have been banished from the area.

Meanwhile, once the dam cracks, breaks or overflows, it will inundate 1.5 million people in the provinces of Pangasinan, Nueva Ecija and Tarlac including the 61,400 population of the municipalities of San Manuel and San Nicolas, Pangasinan.

CLEARLY, THE GOVERNMENT IS SACRIFICING THE LIVES, PROPERTY AND LIVELIHOOD OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE SAKE OF CONTINUING THE PROJECT.

The SRMDP's foundation is also weak because it was built along the Digdig and San Manuel Fault Lines. Thus, there is a very high possibility of widespread land erosion. The dam is also incapable of withstanding big floods.

Clearly, the government is sacrificing the lives, property and livelihood of the people for the sake of continuing the project. The SRMDP has been set up for the interests of foreign mining corpora-

tions, so the SRPC could amass millions in profit, so foreign banks could profit from the interest on loans, so special economic zones, agro-industrial estates and agents of the ruling class agents could collect enormous amounts of money from multimillion infrastructure contracts.

The SRMDP is particularly important to multinational mining corporations. The dam will provide not only electricity but also a gateway for corporations' mine tailings, enabling them to avoid huge environmental cleanup expenses. Australia's Western Mining Corporation is one of these companies. It currently has a mining project in Tubo, Abra. The Newmont Mining Co. also has an application for gold mining on the Benguet, Nueva Vizcaya and Pangasinan boundaries, on 100,000 hectares of land right beside the dam undergoing construction. Newmont is the largest gold mining company in the US.

The struggle continues

In 1970, the Ibaloi minority succeeded in stopping the construction of Agno III that was later known as the Tabu Dam. Marcos withdrew the project because of the people's strong opposition to the dam. In 1980, the Butbut tribe in Kalinga led by Macliling Dulag also firmly opposed the construction of Chico Dam.

At present, 20,000 organized Ibaloi are standing their ground against the construction of the SRMDP. Progressive organizations and individuals within and outside the country are supporting them. They are among the thousands of people who marched in Baguio City and Makati on March 14. Meanwhile a petition from Japan signed by 77 groups and individuals and 12 Japanese parliament members and 500 individuals from 26 countries in support of all Filipinos opposing the construction of the dam has been presented to the government. ►

Lessons from the Hacienda Looc struggle

On July 1, the Supreme Court finally threw out the case filed by around 10,000 farmers against Fil-Estate Inc. and Manila Southcoast Development Corporation, landgrabber-developers of the 8,650-hectare Hacienda Looc. But due to their political consciousness and united strength forged through five years of struggle, the court's decision did not weaken the farmers' resolve to continue striving for genuine land reform

Gathering strength. The farmers offered scattered resistance when the reactionary state cancelled their land titles in 1995 to pave the way for the developers' plan to put up a giant tourist facility in Hacienda Looc. But the farmers eventually banded together. By means of a militant organization they established, they effectively exposed and opposed the developer-government conspiracy to grab their land. They also strongly resisted the fascist violence inflicted on their ranks.

The peasants' unity was forged by exposing Fil-Estate and MSDC's anti-peasant project. Their militancy was raised and their fighting will strengthened as they grasped the basic nature of the land problem and the roots of the entire people's suffering.

Facing the developers' schemes. The developers attempted to destroy the farmers' unity and quell their resistance. They also paid lip service to "reforms" and organized fake peasant groups led by their agent, barangay captain Max Limeta. Limeta employed intimidation and violence as well as money to compel the farmers to surrender their land and conviction. Expectedly, some farmers were deceived, pressured or coerced and bought off by the developers due to extreme poverty, and this caused the peasant association to suffer some setbacks.

But because the capitalists' attempt to push land conversion only intensified their suffering, majority of the affected farmers, especially those from the most basic strata, were more than ever impelled to fight. In response, they assiduously launched various forms of mass actions to oppose the project and ventilate the issue of genuine land reform. At the same time, the peasants asserted their land rights by redoubling their efforts to plant and cultivate their fields.

Renouncing reformism. The peasant association also frustrated the attempt of revisionist renegade Frank Pascual's faction to lead the militant peasant struggle astray.

Pascual and his cohorts posed as revolutionaries. While turning a blind eye to the state's unbridled use of violence against the farmers, they bragged

about the "peaceful solution" to the land problem. They distorted the state's innate character in order to defend the ruling class and impart the erroneous principle that the peasant masses could fully achieve their aspirations within the framework of the reactionary system (demonstrations, petitions, elections, negotiations, etc.).

Pascual's clique attempted to wear the farmers out through consecutive mass actions while dismissing the all-round strengthening of the mass organization. They slandered genuine agrarian reform as well as mass activists and revolutionaries who advocate it.

Pascual's camp failed as the farmers persevered in advancing the mass movement. The peasants addressed the painstaking task of strengthening their militant association within the framework of resisting feudalism. They continued to deepen their political consciousness and joined the national democratic struggle of the Filipino people.

Tactical victories of the mass movement. Through perseverance, the peasant movement in Hacienda Looc won tactical victories. Due to mass actions, the developers' destructive operations were temporarily halted. The greedy capitalists behind the project suffered losses while the mass movement in the area progressed.

◀ Japan has temporarily stopped releasing funds borrowed by the Philippine government for the project. But the US-Estrada regime has declared that it will push through with the project whatever happens, in compliance with the whims of its foreign master.

The Party, New People's Army and the entire revolutionary movement are one with the people in opposing

the SRMDP. We hold the lessons of victorious struggles against the Tabu and Chico Dams. If Estrada has had the uncontrollable urge to announce that the project shall continue at all cost, the more the people should hold fast to armed revolution as their primary means of resistance. Only in carrying this out can the people achieve a gigantic victory and build the genuine monument of history. **AB**

Another tactical victory involved the peasant association's exposé that the project was allowed to proceed without an environmental clearance. Four times, cases were filed against the companies responsible for causing land erosion, damaging crops and muddying up the water in the hacienda.

Aside from this, a number of the hacienda's armed guards were convinced to resign and cooperate with the peasant association. Also due to the mass actions, government agencies were compelled to confront the peasants' protests. The Hacienda Looc struggle also gained national and international support.

Advance agrarian revolution. The farmers in Hacienda Looc are among millions of peasants firmly advancing the struggle against the sale and conversion of land as well as other struggles upholding their interests and rights. They continue to carry this out within the framework of a comprehensive program of reducing land rent, increasing farm workers' wages, eradicating usury and increasing peasant production. In the process, they constantly deepen their political consciousness, empower themselves and destroy the feudal power of landlords in the countryside step by step.

It continues to become ever clearer to the struggling farmers that the ruling system is the basis of their suffering. They have grasped that so long as the ruling system stands, reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries will connive and hatch up schemes to make their interests prevail.

Thus, the fight for genuine social change continues. Our duty to expand and deepen the farmers' and the entire people's unity for waging revolution continues. More Hacienda Loocs shall emerge and become arenas of intense struggles. **AB**

Southern Tagalog's cultural squad

Bannering revolutionary art

They traverse guerrilla fronts and zones-carrying on the task of propagating and advancing revolutionary culture in Southern Tagalog. They promote the different art and literary forms like music, theater and other performing arts, visual arts and poetry among others. They are the cultural cadres and activists comprising the cultural squad of Southern Tagalog.

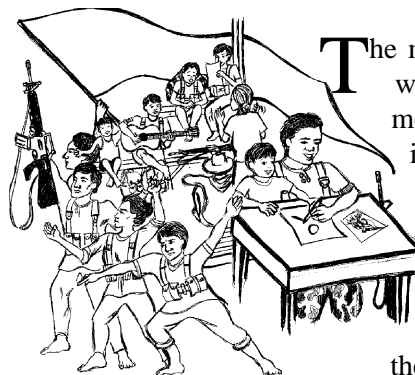
The cultural squad was formed by the regional Party leadership in 1997 in response to the pressing need to advance revolutionary cultural work along with other tasks. This is also in keeping with the challenge to develop and mold the Red army into a cultural army. Within the framework of the people's army, the cultural squad serves as a detachment of the *Artista at Manunulat ng Sambayanan* (ARMAS) in Southern Tagalog.

The cultural squad plays an important role in the further consolidation of mass organizations and NPA units in Southern Tagalog. Among their tasks is taking part in the formation and strengthening of cultural committees and ARMAS chapters in the people's army and in barrios undergoing consolidation. In their tour of the different guerrilla fronts and zones where they carry out mass work, they conduct study sessions and trainings to develop the artistic and literary skills of local activists and NPA fighters.

The squad also publishes *Dagitab*, the regional cultural magazine of Southern Tagalog. They diligently gather and compile contributed works of comrades and the masses such as poems, essays, stories, songs and illustrations. Works that are the result of trainings conducted in different guerrilla fronts have been published in *Dagitab*.

The squad oversaw the release of two compilations of revolutionary songs in cassettes: "Dakilang Hamon" (Great Challenge) in 1997 and "Alab ng Digmang Bayan" (Fervor of People's War) in 1999. These compilations have been instrumental in the promotion of revolutionary songs not only in Southern Tagalog but in other regions as well.

The cultural squad also leads performances during the Party and NPA anniversaries and other select occasions. It maintains links and cooperates with some progressive cultural groups in urban areas.



The masses and comrades in the region warmly appreciate the revolutionary movement's efforts to advance and put into practice a national, scientific and mass-oriented culture in its day-to-day struggle. The sustained conduct of cultural work is expected to further strengthen the unity between the broad masses of the people and the people's army. **AB**

Amid “unprecedented prosperity” in the US

Oppression and wretchedness among the American workers and people

The celebration of “unprecedented prosperity” in the US is an exclusive feast of the gluttonous American bourgeoisie. Since they are denied the “prosperity” they have created, the American proletariat have no cause to rejoice. The more reason they have to resist the utterly cruel squeezing of every drop of their sweat and the unrestrained exploitation of their labor power.

Squeezing dry the American working class

Propagandists of US imperialism brag that from 1992 to 1999 the US economy continuously expanded. This is the longest period of continuous US economic growth.

The key to the “unprecedented prosperity” now being enjoyed by the bourgeoisie in the US involves none other than squeezing the American proletariat dry.

The Clinton government and US economists celebrate the fact that from April to June, annual productivity rose by 5.3%—the highest for the past 17 years. Thus, workers created bigger value and more products in a shorter period. This is from an average 1.4% increase in 1973-1995 and 2.5% in 1996-1999. Production is being rapidly intensified through the application of high technology in production.

The US continues to lead in the utilization of computers and robots to speed up the work pace of labor and increase surplus value. The monopoly capitalist state actively supports technology research in order to employ this in industries owned by the big bourgeoisie.

At the same time, the state has unleashed, along the current of neoliberalism, the worst policies that enslave workers, all aimed at pressing down wages and dismantling the historic victories of the working class. Bourgeois economists and the US government shamelessly boast that while the productivity of American workers has been rising, costs per individual worker have gone down by 0.4%—which means that as American workers create more value, they receive smaller wages.

Oppression, poverty and widespread social inequity

Thus, American workers are experiencing conditions which, relative to their society and history, are comparable to the situation besetting Filipino workers in terms of wages, unemployment and job security and social guarantees.

A worker receiving the minimum wage would earn \$9,512 a year which is less than half the government-determined poverty threshold of \$17,072 per year. All throughout the 1990s, the real wages of ordinary workers dropped. Presently, the value of real wages is far below that in the 1970s. As a result, more than 46 million (almost 20% of the population) are in absolute poverty.

The US government boasts that its current unemployment rates are one of the lowest in history. But the fact is, majority of the newly created jobs are part-time, further pulling down wage levels. There has also been a slowdown in industrial production, resulting in job loss. From March 1998 to September

1999, for example, more than 530,000 lost their jobs in the manufacturing sector.

Because of low wages and unemployment or underemployment, there now prevails in the US living conditions which are not too different from those in backward countries such as the Philippines. Seven to eight million do not have decent homes. There are ghettos in capital cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and others where workers and unemployed, Afro-Americans, Latinos, Asians and other minorities suffer from extremely difficult living conditions.

The US Department of Agriculture estimates in a 1999 study that 36 million Americans do not have sufficient food. The US Conference of Mayors, on the other hand, showed that in December 1999, the demand for emergency food-related assistance was highest since 1992, that of emergency housing-related assistance, since 1994; and that 21% of these were not met. Twenty-five million people, 80% of whom have families with children, rely on food stamps.

Despite this, the US government continues to reduce budgetary allocations for social services. In 1999, the government cut \$54 billion from the budget for unemployment pensions, health services and food programs. A growing share of the responsibility of providing food to the hungry is being shouldered by private organizations. There are 44.3 million people who do not have health insurance because of the elimination of programs such as Medicare.

American society is becoming more and more polarized between the greater majority of the poor, exploited and downtrodden; and the small minority enjoying “unprecedented prosperity”. In 1998, the salaries being received by the heads of US corporations were 419 times greater than the wages of ordinary workers.

17 SOLDIERS DEAD IN NEGROS AMBUSH

Seventeen soldiers were killed and six were wounded in an ambush by New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas on August 21 in Sitio Bulod, Barangay Carabalan, Himamaylan, Negros Occidental. They were among 28 soldiers aboard a truck who were sent as reinforcement troops in pursuit operations against the NPA.

The soldiers who were under the 303rd Brigade of the Philippine Army belonged to a composite team from the 11th and 61st IBs based in central and southern Negros that have been accused by the masses of committing human rights violations.

16 HPRS SEIZED IN COTABATO RAID

Two M14s, 11 Garands, three M16s, a radio communication set, ammunition and military uniforms were seized by NPA Red fighters without firing a single shot in a raid on a detachment of the 64th IB in Danlag, Tampakan, South Cotabato on August 20. The NPA burned down the detachment.

Prior to this, the NPA raided a ranch in the mountains of Koronadal, South Cotabato on August 15. The NPA entered the Sueno Ranch in Sitio Kupon, Barangay San Jose at around 6 a.m. Seized from the ranch were assorted weapons and communications equipment. The raid was a punitive measure taken after the ranch owner refused to recognize the movement's policies on taxation.

BATTALION COMMANDER KILLED IN AGUSAN AMBUSH

A Philippine Army battalion commander was killed and three of his men were wounded when their jeep was ambushed by NPA Red fighters in Barangay San Andres, Bunawan, Agusan del Sur at around noon on August 14.

Killed was Maj. Nestor Velasco, commanding officer of the 62nd IB based in Trento town. Seized from the tactical offensive were seven high-powered firearms: an M203, two M14s and four M16s. A VHF radio was also confiscated.

12 FIREARMS SEIZED IN LAGUNA RAID

Twelve firearms and other military equipment were seized in a raid launched by NPA guerrillas on the police station in Sta. Maria, Laguna on August 7. Wounded in the raid was Sta. Maria police chief S/Insp. Benito Mozo.

Among those confiscated were four M16s, four .45s, three .38s, a radio transceiver, a camera and important documents.

EIGHT POLICEMEN KILLED IN MINDORO AMBUSH

Eight policemen were killed and three were wounded in an ambush by NPA Red fighters in Barangay Antonino, Victoria, Oriental Mindoro on July 4. Among those wounded was Victoria P/Chief Insp. William Destura. Killed was

The income of the top 2.7 million (1% of the population) is equivalent to the income of the poorest 100 million (38%). One percent own 40% of the total wealth in the US, while the lowest 80% own a mere 16%.

Fascist suppression and resistance of workers and people

Contrary to its official commitment to civil liberties, the US government employs its fascist machinery to suppress the proletariat and American people. Using pepper-spray, rubber bullets and truncheons, it forcefully disperses demonstrations and strikes that express the people's disgust and reflect the widespread social unrest in the US.

The US government systematically employs the police and courts to file trumped-up charges against militant activists and labor leaders. In the past

years, the budgets for courts increased four times faster than those for education; and twice faster than those for hospitals and health services. Around the world, the US has the highest percentage of its population in prison, indicating how "effectively" courts are used.

Still, fascist suppression cannot stop the resistance of the American workers and people. In 1999, despite attacks on unionism, no less than 600,000 workers were estimated to have organized unions, a 25% increase compared to 1998, and the largest expansion in 20 years. This shows the determination of workers to determinedly fight for higher wages, wrest back their benefits and improve working conditions.

Workers were among the biggest groups that comprised the 30,000 who

demonstrated against the World Trade Organization (WTO) from November 30 to December 3, 1999 in Seattle. This was repeated in April when several tens of thousands rallied against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Washington, DC despite the arrest of 1,800 activists before and during the demonstrations.

These demonstrations and other forms of resistance by the proletariat and people shatter the illusion of "unprecedented prosperity" in American society. For sure, class struggle will further intensify in the US in the years to come. This should be correctly taken advantage of by revolutionary forces in order build a proletarian party that has deep roots among the working people and can lead not only in the day-to-day economic struggles, but in the revolutionary struggle for socialism. **AB**

deputy police chief SPO4 Wilfred Feliciano.

The ambushed troopers were from the Victoria police force and the newly assigned PNP Special Action Force in Oriental Mindoro that replaced the notorious 49th IB.

A land mine set off against the troopers' two vehicles signalled the start of the tactical offensive. The NPA confiscated the policemen's weapons before safely retreating.

PNP STATION RAIDED IN ZAMBALES

NPA guerrillas raided the police station in Palauig, Zambales on July 21 at around 7:30 p.m. Thirty weapons of various caliber were seized in the offensive. Three policemen were wounded in the firefight.

NPA PUNISHES SPY COP IN ALBAY

New People's Army Red fighters punished SPO3 Rogelio Oliquiano, intelligence officer of the Philippine National Police Regional Intelligence Group, on August 26 in Barangay Palapas, Ligao, Albay. Oliquiano was aboard a motorcycle and had just gathered information from his assets in Pioduran town when ambushed by the Red fighters. Seized from him was a 9 mm pistol.

POLICE OFFICIAL KILLED IN BOHOL FIGHTING

Insp. Victor Hibaya, commander of the Bohol PNP Provincial Mobile Group, was killed in a firefight in Barangay Overland, Buenavista, Bohol on June 21. Hibaya was leading an eight-man team that encircled a group of NPA fighters in the barangay. The NPA safely retreated without suffering a single casualty.

CONSTRUCTION COMPANY IN AURORA PUNISHED

Punitive action was taken by the NPA on a construction company in Dinalungan, Aurora on July 6.

The NPA flagged down two dump trucks of the SMC Construction Corp. and burned them down after the owner ignored the revolutionary movement's taxation policies.

OPLAN MAKABAYAN CONDEMNED IN QUEZON

Some 1,000 peasants, fisherfolk and Dumagat tribespeople camped out in front of the Quezon provincial capitol in Lucena City on July 10. The eight-day protest action was led by the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan.

The protesters assailed the continued and unbridled military operations under Oplan Makabayan being waged by the AFP in the Sierra Madre mountains that have wrought grave violations of their human rights, including their forcible evacuation.

Transport groups successfully launch series of strikes

Drivers and their supporters successfully launched a series of transport strikes in various parts of the country in July and August to oppose the endless rounds of oil price increases and demand a P125-raise in the minimum wage.

On August 7, a nationwide coordinated protest action led by the Pinag-isang Samahan ng mga Tsuper at Opereytor Nationwide (PISTON), Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) and Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) was successfully launched. They strikers also demanded a P1-increase in fares.

In Mindanao, public transport was paralyzed in Koronadal, Davao, Kidapawan, Tagum, Digos, Mati and Northern Mindanao while bus companies suspended operations in South Cotabato, Saranggani and General Santos City. In the Visayas, transportation was 99% paralyzed in Iloilo and 90% in Bacolod in a two-day strike while bus and jeepney drivers picketed oil depots in Mandaue and Lapu-lapu. In Luzon, drivers from Bicol (Albay and Sorsogon), Pampanga, Bulacan, Bataan, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac and Metro Manila also joined the strike.

It was the second such strike in two months. Earlier, PISTON had led on July 10 a massive drivers' and workers' strike. The strike paralyzed major jeepney routes in Metro Manila (90%), Bulacan (100%), Cavite (80%), Tarlac (95%), Pampanga (90%), Bataan (70%), Nueva Ecija (40%), Cebu and Negros (90%). KMU and BAYAN also supported the protest action with 12,000 of their members massing up in front of the offices of Caltex, Petron and Shell.

In Davao City, 8,000 drivers waged a strike on July 17. The strike led by the Transport of Southern Mindanao for Solidarity, Independence and Nationalism and the Alliance of Operators and Drivers in Davao City and supported by BAYAN paralyzed 90% of public transport in the area.

Meanwhile, Estrada's State of the Nation Address on July 24 was also met with a two-day drivers' strike in Kalibo, Aklan. Members of the Bus and Jeepney Operators Association, various other tricycle drivers' and operators' groups, BAYAN and the League of Filipino Students joined the mass action.